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Thesis

THE INFLUENCE OF THE MIRACLE PLAYS OF THE  
EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH ON THE SECULAR DRAMA

Submitted by

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213





BRIEF.





# The Influence of the Miracle Plays of the Early Christian Church on the Secular Drama.

## I.

Definitions:--Miracle--Mystery--often incorrectly used.

## II.

Liturgical Drama--embryonic representations given in interior of church. History--Origin of liturgical drama in religion--disappearance of licentious representations of decadent paganism--church forbade faithful to attend immoral theatre, hence disappearance--advent of new moral drama. Subject taken from Holy Writ or based on church feasts--language, Latin--versification instead of prose--vernacular, mixture of French and Latin--langue d'oc--langue d'oïl--Examples--"Les Vierges Sages et les Vierges Folles."

## III.

The Evolution of the Miracle Plays--introduction of pagan images. "Le Massacre des Innocents"--"Les Saintes Femmes au Tombeau"--transfers from interior of church to public square--inventive genius--clergy gives way to laity--spectators more numerous--Transition from liturgical drama to Miracle Plays. Characteristics of Miracle Plays. Setting--interior of church--gallery outside of church--scaffolding in field--in grave yard--market place--actors, clergy and laity from all walks of life--conventional costumes worn only by Christ and Virgins--devils disguised--other actors same as spectators. Intervention of Virgin or of Saints in human affairs.

## IV.

Link between liturgical drama of eleventh century and mystery play





of twelfth century--"Drame d'Adam"--language--subject--divided into three parts--Adam and Eve--Cain and Abel--Messiah--Final sermon, last judgment. "La Résurrection"--fragmentary --language peculiarities.

## V.

Thirteenth century--deviation from liturgical drama--"Le Jeu de Saint Nicholas"--author--prologue--action of play--originality of author--precursor of romanticists."Le Miracle de Théophile" author--sotry."Le Jeu de la Feuille"--comedy--"Le Jeu de Robin et de Marion"--pastoral play and comic opera.

## VI.

Plays of the fourteenth century--"Les Miracles de Notre Dame".author--or authors--subjects drawn from many sources,as miracles-legends-history itself,dialect.

1.--"Robert le Diable." Most celebrated of Miracles of Notre Dame--fabulous hero--theme of poets--two plays--life of wickedness--life of penance--God's forgiveness.

2--"Amis et Amilles"--story hinges on remarkable resemblance of Amis and Amilles--crime of play--repentance--intervention of Christ and Virgin-Te Deum.

3. "L'Enfant Donné au Diable"--characters--crime,broken vow--intervention of Christ and Virgin.

4--"Fille du Roi de Hongrie"--characters--plot centers around a widowed king who wishes to marry his daughter--escape of daughter during her wanderings God,the Virgin,and the angels comfort her--final adjustment of complications--resembles modern melodrama--absurdity of finale.

5--"Histoire de Grisélidis"--characters borrowed from legendry moral-





Thesis.





## The Influence of the Miracle Plays of the Early Christian Church on the Secular Drama.

The two names "Miracle Plays" and "Mysteries" are used to designate the religious drama which developed among the Christian nations at the end of the Middle Ages.

The word "Mystery" has been applied to all Christian drama prior to the sixteenth century, whereas the name should be confined to those of the fifteenth century, which represent the great dramatic effort anterior to the Renaissance.

Before this period, dramatic pieces were called "plays" or "miracles" in which were portrayed the miraculous interference of a saint and more particularly of the Virgin in human affairs, and manifested in some particular way.

II        The embryonic representations, at first given in the interior of the church, have been designated as liturgical dramas. The earliest germs of the liturgical drama were found in the Trope. Two of the most ancient Tropes known to us are as follows:--the first--"Quem quaeritis in praesepe, pastores, ducite? Respondent, Salvatorem, Christum Dominum,"--being interpolated in the Christmas office; the second--"Quem quaeritis in sepulchro, Christicolae-Respondent, Jesum Nazarenum crucifixum"--being interpolated in the Easter office. The Church had forbidden the faithful to attend the licentious representations of decadent paganism such as the Bacchanalia and calendry solemnities. The revels were of such an unseemly character that a council, assembled at Rome in the eleventh century, decreed that the priests must warn the men and women who assembled in





the churches on the festival days, that they should not unite in dances with singing and leaping after the manner of the pagans. After this immoral theatre disappeared, there gradually sprang up a new drama to the development of which the Church contributed--a drama that was not only moral but edifying and pious.

At first the text of the liturgical drama was very brief, in prose and in Latin. The subjects were taken from Holy Writ, or from the Gospel, or from the Office of the Day. Thus the solemn feasts of the Church such as Easter and Christmas were the occasions upon which these dramas were acted, the priest representing the religious event that was being celebrated. By degrees, versification crept in and soon pervaded the entire drama--prose became the exception. Then the vernacular appeared and both the Latin and the vernacular went along side by side. Thus in the French drama "Les Vierges Sages et les Vierges Folles" there is a mixture of Latin and of French--*langue d'oc* and a few words of *langue d'oïl*. In this drama, the chorus employs Latin, while Christ and the virgins use both Latin and French, and the angel speaks in French. This drama, contemporaneous with the Chanson de Roland, is prefaced by a Latin prologue which commences thus:--

"Oiet virgines, aiso que vos dirum;  
Aiscet presen que vos commandarum;  
Attendet un espos, Jhesu salvaire a nom  
Gaire no i dormet."





## III

The drama seemed to be undergoing numerous transformations so that we see even profane and pagan images being admitted. Thus the liturgical drama "Les Prophètes du Christ" was so modified that we finally have "La Fête des Anes" performed in honor of the ass that carried our Saviour. Here we see Balaam, mounted on a wooden ass, enter the Church followed by the prophets, six Jews, and six Gentiles. After the Gloria Patri and the Credo, the cry hee-haw was repeated three times by the priest who employed the same formula instead of the Ite, missa est. Since the liturgical drama was designed to enhance the attractions of the religious office, its dramatic character was most pronounced at the chief festivals of Christmas, Easter, the Epiphany, the Ascension, and Pentecost. There were also other liturgical dramas; "Le Massacre des Innocents", "Les Saintes Femmes au Tombeau," "La Conversion de Saint Paul," "La Résurrection de Lazare."

In the evolution of the drama I have already mentioned the transition from Latin to the vernacular in order that all the people might understand. But the drama becomes more immediately interesting and modern when another step is taken and the play is transferred from the interior of the church to the public square or parvis before the sanctuary. At this period we begin to see inventive genius assert itself, also that the clergy gives way to the laity and that the spectators become more numerous. For instance, at Easter the priests acted the part of the three Holy Women by covering their faces with veils to complete the illusion, and again at the Ascension a priest equipped with wings climbed the outside gallery of the church and simulated an ascent into heaven. Along with the litur-





gical drama, another dramatic type of a religious character developed--the Miracle Plays.

From a study of the various Miracle Plays we find certain characteristics worth noting. At the beginning we saw that the plays were staged within the church, then transferred outside the church. Sometimes it was the outside gallery of the church, or perhaps in a theatre backed up to the church. Again the theatre is a sort of scaffolding in two superposed stages built in the public square or in a field, or even in a graveyard. Or they were played in the puys which were under the protection of the Virgin. The actors at first were the priests who finally gave way to the laity who represented all walks of life. These actors can finally be traced to the Confrères which eventually established the first permanent theatre. Costumes, which to-day play such an important part of any drama, can be disposed of by noting that Christ and the Virgin were the only characters to wear conventional costumes, while the devils were the only ones who were disguised. As to the other actors, they wore costumes similar to the spectators. Another characteristic of the Miracle Play was the miraculous interference of a saint, more particularly the Virgin, in human affairs and manifested in a particular way.

#### IV

The link between the liturgical drama of the eleventh century and the Mystery Play of the twelfth century is represented by the "Drame d'Adam et d'Eve." This hieratic composition, the work of a Norman author, dates back to the first part of the twelfth century. It is really the first religious play written in French, but in the dialect of the author. The rubrics, however, are written in Latin. In other words, this piece, characterized by being written in French, proves





that the secularizing of the theatre had already set in. A second characteristic of this piece which also shows that secularization of the theatre had set in, was that it was played outside the church. The subject of the play extends from the fall of Adam and Eve in the terrestrial Paradise to the prophets who foretell the coming of the Redeemer. The play is divided into three parts accompanied by choruses, and closing with an epilogue. The first part tells the story of Adam and Eve:--first, their life in Paradise, where are to be seen, the Latin rubric says, "Odoriferi, fructus et frondes, sint in eo diverse arbores et fructus in eis dependentes ut amenissimus locus videatur." We witness the temptation and fall of Eve, the punishment of the sinners and their carrying off to hell by the demons, and the clattering of caldrons:--"colledent caldaria et lebetes suos ut exterius audiantur." A second act gives the story of Cain and Abel, and a third the procession of the prophets to announce the coming of the Messiah. The whole ends with an epilogue--a verse sermon on the fifteen signs of the Last Judgment and the need of penitence. This play, uniting the three modes of tragedy, pantomime, and opera was certainly performed, but where and by whom seems to be unknown.

Contemporaneous with "Le Drame d'Adam" is the fragmentary "La Résurrection" composed of some 350 odd lines or verses. The action extends from the request of Joseph of Arimathea to Pilate up to the time the soldiers were sent to Christ's tomb. The rest has been lost. The play is in French but the names of the characters are in Latin. Perhaps two peculiarities may be noted:--





first:--the prologue, in which may be established the rapid development and also the complications in the setting of the play; second, the narration which unceasingly mingles with the prologue and in the same form of versification. This drama is remarkable for another fact, viz:--in it there is not the least trace of the comic which is destined, later on, to enliven the Mysteries. The style is simple, the action quick, and the drama well managed.

V The thirteenth century gives us two complete dramas:--first- "Le Jeu de Saint Nicolas" by Jean Bodel; and second, "Le Miracle de Théophile" by Rutebeuf. These belong to the miracle class. In these we see a great deviation from the original liturgical drama. Jean Bodel was a townsman of Arras, famous for its prosperity. In a chanson of that time, we find reference to God the father, who, feeling rather ill, comes down from heaven and joins the school of poets of Arras in order to get cured.

"Arras est escole de tous bien entendre;  
Quant on veut d'Arras le plus caitif prendre,  
En autre pais se peut boin vendre  
On voit les honors d'Arras si s'estendre,  
Je vi l'autre jor le ceil la sus fendre:  
Diex voloit d'Arras les motès apprendre."

Unfortunately, Bodel was stricken with leprosy and died, in just what year of the thirteenth century is not known--some say 1205. When leaving society, he wrote a very touching piece to his friends, a few lines of which are as follows:--

"Mes j'ai fait mon pèlerinage.  
Diex m'a fendu le passage  
Dont bone volenté avoie  
Et Diex qui tout riens sormonte  
En penitance le me conte!





Quar trop aroie en deux infer!"

Such was the author of "Le Jeu de Saint Nicolas". This play, written in the dialect of northern France and performed in Arras, occupies an important position in the history of the drama. Saint Nicolas was very popular in the Middle Ages. His feast day was celebrated in all the countries and in the Church with a great deal of pomp. The prologue tells us that the drama was performed on the feast day of Saint Nicolas:--

"Nous volommes parler anuit,  
De Saint Nicolas le confès  
Seigneur, che trouvons en le vie  
Del saint dont anuit est la veille."

In the prologue we also find an analysis of the play, a very modern, up-to-date way of doing things. Examine any theatre program. I mentioned before that this drama shows a great deviation from the original liturgical drama. Now whatever of religion there is in it--miracle--is nothing more than a pretext for the author's ingenious developments. One of these aforesaid ingenious developments was the manner in which Bodel transferred the play to the time of the first crusade of Saint Louis, thus connecting it indirectly with contemporaneous events. In this way, he combined modern and ecclesiastical history and transformed the drama into a work of realism. The action of the play begins immediately after the prologue. After being informed that his kingdom has been invaded by the Christians, a pagan king, accompanied by his seneschal, consults the statue of Tervagant, a fabulous pagan god.

"Se je doi gaagnier, se ri  
Et se je doi perdre se pleure  
Seneschal, que vous est avis?





Tervagant a plouré et ris."

The reply of the seneschal informs him that first he will be victorious and later he will be converted to Christianity. Notice the explicit manner in which the auditors are made aware of the dénouement. On the other hand, the Christians massed on the plain encouraging each other to strike for their faith are visited by an angel who tells them to fight bravely, that they will all be killed, but will go to Paradise. Some of the passages in this particular part of the play are considered as beautiful as any that <sup>have</sup> ever been written during the Middle Ages. The battle is on, the pagan king is victorious, and the Christians lay dead upon the battle field. Again the angel appears to pity and to console them:--

"A chevalier qui chi gissès,  
Com par estes bon èuré.  
Comme or ches euvres despisèes  
Le mont ou tout avès duré.

-----  
Qui de bon cuer le servira  
Je se parme ne perdera  
Ains sera ès chieus couronnès  
De tel couronne comme avès."

This scene is considered the equal of the most beautiful pages of "La Chanson de Roland." From this scene some think that there is an illusion to the battle of Massoura when Louis' army was lost in 1250. Some think the words jeune chretien, nouveau chevalier allude to Robert d'Artois, a brother of Louis, who was killed in the battle of Massoura, but historical facts reduce these conclusions to mere hypotheses. Of all the Christians there is but one alive, an old man







found kneeling before the statue of Saint Nicholas. The pagan king before whom the old man is brought, wishes to test the Saint as to those things the old man has said concerning the Saint. The king has it announced throughout his kingdom that the royal treasure is open guarded ~~only~~ by the statue of Saint Nicholas. Of course the treasure is stolen, by some gallows birds, with the result that the old man is thrown into prison where an angel appears and tells him to be patient.

The scene now turns to a tavern in which the robbers are having a riotous time. Here also the angel appears and tells the thieves to return the money else they would be hanged. Not only was the money returned but doubled. In the final dénouement we see all the pagans converted to Christianity, the statue of Tervagant thrown down, and all the converts rushing to be baptized singing the TE DEUM. There are some striking features about this play. The work of the author is certainly original and he has given us, 350 years before Shakespeare and 600 years before the romanticists, the example of the drama such as the moderns thought they invented about 1827. I think we can safely say that Jean Bodel realized in the twelfth century all the theories of the nineteenth century.

Another play of this period was "Le Miracle de Théophile" by Rutebeuf who was born in Champagne but lived in Paris. It has been said that at first he was a gambler and idler, but he seems to have ended his days in a cloister. Théophilus was the aconomus of the Church of Adana in Cilicia, who, on losing his office, bartered his soul to the devil. After seven years he prostrated himself in the chapel of Notre-Dame and begs the Virgin to intercede for him. Finally she procures from Satan the contract signed in blood and orders him to bring it to







the bishop who was to read it to the people in order to prevent any such occurrences in the future. The second part of the drama is taken up with the penance of Théophilus and apparently is not at all as energetic as the first part. While studying this drama one is strongly reminded of Goethe's "Faust" who, also sold his soul to the devil, and who eventually did penance and was saved. Of course the purpose of both i.e. Théophilus and Faust--is very different. Then too, Satan strongly resembles Mephistopheles in "Faust." This work of Rutebeuf is very short--about seven hundred verses and is written in the dialect of the Ile-de-France. This story was not only told in the other Latin and French verses, but also represented by bas-reliefs in many churches. It seems very probable that Rutebeuf composed rather a commentary than a real drama on these bas-reliefs. There seems to be about a dozen such scenes without any logical sequence and the same seems true of his drama. One can safely conclude that Rutebeuf was outside his sphere in this drama.

At this period I might mention two plays but of totally different nature:--"Le Jeu de la Feuille" and "Le Jeu de Robin et de Marion" of Adam de la Halle. Adam de la Halle, like Bodel a townsman of Arras, gives us the comic theatre. These plays were probably brought out before some pays of the author's native city, but there seems to be nothing to connect them with God or with the Saints. As a matter of fact they stand alone; and "Le Jeu de la Feuille" is more akin to Aristophanic comedy than it is to anything else in France at its own time. "Le Jeu de Robin et de Marion" is the first example of a pastoral play and of a comic opera in France; much of it was sung. It is one of the masterpieces of French literature. It is surprising to find at this period these two isolated plays.







VI

Fortunately the dramatic repertoire of the fourteenth century is more intact than that of the preceeding centuries, because there are extant some forty-three Miracles of Notre-Dame, one secular Mystery, five Provençal Mysteries and one Mystery of the Passion. I shall deal with the Miracles of Notre-Dame. These religious plays all bore the same character:--the representation of some miraculous event produced by the intervention of Our Lady and hence the name of Notre Dame. Some of them contained attacks on the Pope and so their performance within the sanctuary or at the church door became an impossible matter. Hence they were performed in the puys or semi-religious assemblies, which were under the protection of Our Lady. Others give us valuable information as to the manners of the nobility, of the bourgeoisie, of the people, and of the ecclesiastical world in the fourteenth century. The author, or authors, belonging to the Ile-de-France or to Champagne, and writing in the dialect of the Ile-de-France, drew the subjects from many sources, viz:--the Miracles of G. de Coinci; from those of Jean le Marchant; from the Chansons de Geste; from the legends of the Saints; from the stories of adventure; and from history itself. The most celebrated of the Miracle Plays of Notre Dame is "La Légende de Robert le Diable!" (1) Robert le Diable is one of those fabulous heroes who has occupied much of the poetry of the Middle Ages. Le Romanis de Robert le Dyable, a poem of the thirteenth century, and Les Croniques de Normendie, fix him as an historic person. In the poem he ends his days in a hermitage where he had gone to do penance. Les Croniques make him out the son of Aubert, duke and governor of Normandy, who lived during the times of Pepin le Bref. No serious historian seems to have mentioned Aubert. There is no real reason to confound him with the father or the son of William the Conqueror. There is nothing in their







lives of the diabolical. One then may conclude that Robert le Diable was a fabulous person. According to the manuscript of Cange: <sup>\*\*</sup>"Cy commence un miracle de Notre Dame de Roberty le Dyable, filz du duc de Normandie"--the duke of Normandy reproaches Robert because of his wicked life. Robert has pillaged the abbeys and killed all those who resisted him. The rich barons, whose houses have been ransacked by him and by his band of brigands, complain to the duke who immediately sends two messengers to imprison this refractory son. Robert puts out the messengers' eyes. Banished from the country, he takes up his abode in the forest where he meets and kills the hermits who were praying to God. A passerby informs him that his mother is in the Château d'Argues near-by, whither he goes. His mother's fear of him sort of brings him to himself. "Why should I be so wicked?" he says. His mother then tells him the secret of his birth. God would not give her a child so she demanded one, i.e. Robert from the devil. Robert fears condemnation. After making restitution, he sets out on foot to Rome, begging on the way, to see the Pope. The Pope sends him to a hermit who tells Robert the penance he must perform:--

"Qu'il fault que le fol contreface  
N'en quelque lieu qu'il soit, n'en place  
Ne parle nient plus qu'un muet,  
Et avec ce, pour fain qu'il ait,  
Li enjoins qu'il ne mengera  
Jamais fors ce qu'aux chiens pourra tollir."

These conditions have been given to the hermit by God, Our Lady, and the angels, all of whom came down from heaven. Robert gladly accepts





them. The emperor having pity on him, takes him into his household but Robert faithfully carries out the condition placed upon him by the hermit. The scene changes. The pagans attack the empire. The emperor sends out a call to all his subjects to arm themselves to repel the invaders. God, through an angel, reveals to Robert where he can find arms. Unrecognized he marched to battle and thanks to his terrible blows the emperor is victorious. Again he assumes the rôle of a dumb fool and hies himself to a dogs manger. The king's daughter, also dumb, followed him and by signs makes it known that the unknown chevalier is none other than the fool in the dog's manger. Nobody believes her. The pagans again appear and Robert is responsible for a second victory. A soldier who is curious to ferret out the secret of the unknown warrior, strikes him with a spear. The iron tip remains in the wound but the wooden part breaks off. The unknown knight disappears. The emperor promises his daughter in marriage, with half his empire, to the one who would bring back the iron tip of the spear. Another soldier in love with the princess tries to trick the emperor, but his daughter, suddenly recovering her speech, tells the whole story. In the meantime the hermit, forewarned by God, appears on the scene and looses Robert's tongue, telling him that God had pardoned him. The emperor offers him his daughter's hand and his throne but Robert wants to follow the hermit who orders him to marry the princess and thus become heir to the empire.

(2) Another of these famous Miracles de Notre-Dame is "Amis et Amilles" which requires twenty characters. Amis et Amilles resembled each other and the play opens with their meeting after a search of







seven years. They offer their services to the king of France to help him conquer an army of rebels. Amis receives the hand of Countess Lubias as his reward. Amilles on the other hand remains at court. He is accused by Hardré, a secret enemy, of a terrible crime against the king's daughter. Amille challenges Hardré to a duel and then demands a delay during which he consults Amis. Amis agrees to take his place. A paradox--Amis says he is innocent--the truth--yet he passes for Amilles--the lie--Hardré is killed. The king offers his daughter's hand to Amis whom he takes for Amilles. Amis promises to marry the king's daughter and then seeks out Amilles in order to change rôles once more. By divine intervention God sends the angel Gabriel to tell Amis that he will be stricken with leprosy because ~~he has~~ perjured himself. Amis, now an outcast, lives by begging and soon arrives before the palace of Amilles. Saint Michael has informed him that he will never be cured until he shall bathe himself in the blood of Amilles' children. Amilles immediately cuts the children's throats and with their blood washes Amis' leprosy sores. Amis is cured and God, with the Virgin and two arch-angels, descends from heaven and restores the children to life. Everybody joins in singing the TE DEUM.

(3) A third famous Miracle de Notre Dame is "L'Enfant Donné au Diable." This play has eighteen characters. A woman has made a vow of chastity to the Virgin. Her husband agreed, but being tempted by the devil, he breaks his promise. The wife, through spite, promises the child to the devil. At the birth of the child, two devils appear on the scene to claim their due but the mother begs them to leave the child with her for seven years and promises not to have the child baptized. The mo-







ther then calls upon the Virgin to succor her, and she, in turn with the angels Gabriel and Michael, descends from heaven to give her whatever help is needed. In the seventh year the devils again appear to demand the child. Again the mother begs that the child be left with her for eight more years, but she has to sign a contract to that effect. At the age of fourteen the boy learns his own history. He departs for Rome, bribes the guards, and sees the Pope who sends him to a hermit, who in turn sends him to a second hermit, and he in his turn sends him to a third hermit. He has but one year before the devils can claim him. The Virgin decides to save him. In the fifteenth year the devils appear to carry off their prize. A suit is carried on with Christ as the judge and the Virgin as the lawyer for the defense. The Virgin wins her case on what the modern lawyers call a technicality:--the woman alone signed the contract:--

"le femme n'a que donner  
A chose qu'elle ait a garder  
Sans vouloir de son s<sup>g</sup>igneur."

Our Lady has the boy baptized by the third hermit. Christ gives him the name Saviour. The heavenly chorus returns singing, while the boy accompanied by the three hermits returns to his parents who receive him with great rejoicing. There seems to be somewhat of a resemblance between this play and the Miracle of Robert le Diable.

(4) One other of the Miracles is "La Fille du Roi de Hongrie." The miracle required thirty-three characters. The king of Hungary, a widower, wants to marry his own daughter because she looks so much like his dead wife. The Pope, acting on the advice of the cardinals, consents, but the young girl cuts off her hand in order to escape such a marriage. She is condemned to death but is spirited away by the king's soldiers. The king himself falls a prey to remorse and to despair. The scene now changes from Hungary to Scotland where perchance the young girl







has landed. She becomes the wife of the king of Scotland. Unfortunately the king's mother has taken a dislike to her--a dislike that eventually developed into hatred. While the king is in France his wife gives birth to a son. The king's mother intercepts the message by getting the messenger intoxicated and lets the king know that his wife has given birth to a monster. The king's mother again concocts another substitution--a death order for the mother and child instead of a royal letter. She and her son are put aboard a ship. God, Our Lady and the angels come to comfort her in the midst of the ocean. The boat lands at Rome where she enters the service of a senator. The king returns and discovers the truth. He sets off to find his family. He arrives at Rome. He meets the king of Hungary who wants to expiate his crime by confessing to the Pope. The Scottish king lodges at the senator's house. He finds a child with the ring he gave his wife. The child is his son. The mother appears--a happy reunion. They seek the Pope. They meet the king of Hungary in Saint Peter's Church. Another happy reunion. Up to this point it sounds something like a modern melodrama, but from here on it is absurd. A clergyman who was fetching water from the river for the baptismal fonts, brought back a hand--it was the queen's hand. The Pope joined the hand to the arm and it articulated. No trace of the mutilation. The title makes mention of a sturgeon that kept the hand for seven years in his mouth, but the text makes no mention of the episode. The play ends in a thanksgiving celebration.





(5) In the play of Grisélidis, we pass beyond the limits of the stories of Our Lady. It is a pathetic little drama which borrowed some of its characters from the legendary moralities. It seems to be somewhat analogous to several of the miracles found in the Cange manuscript, -but the Virgin plays no rôle and it consequently cannot be put into the category of the Miracles de Notre Dame. The name of this heroine is another one of those names which was famous during the Middle Ages. "La Lai du Frêne de Marie de France" contains the earliest account of her sad adventures. It seems that Petrarch must have known the story even before he read le Décaméron. The story of Grisélidis is in the Decameron by Boccaccio, the story of the tenth day. From the Italians this legend passed on to Chaucer. The story in brief is about as follows:--Gauthier, marquis of Saluces, goes on a heron hunt. Marriage does not enter his head. His barons urge upon him the necessity of taking a wife and an heir to the kingdom. He yields and the nobility are summoned to his marriage. A deer hunt takes the place of the heron hunt. The pack drives the deer to bay and the marquis kills it. The hunt brings the marquis across the path of Grisélidis, a young shepherdess and her father, Janicole, living happily. The marquis immediately falls in love with her. Only on the marriage day does he ask Janicole for his daughter's hand. Grisélidis must promise absolute obedience. She fits well her new and high station. Now starts a series of tests. The young daughter is sent away without her mother's knowledge and their son is treated in the same way. The marquis now receives permission from the Pope to set aside Grisélidis and to marry another woman. This cruel king tells his patient wife that he is sending her home with her dowry, i.e. nothing. The daughter twelve years old is now brought home. Grisél-







id is also brought back and the young princess is presented to her as the noble woman the marquis is about to marry. Grisélidis is now ordered to remain at court to serve the queen--she obeys most faithfully. Finally the marquis explains to her that these were simply trials to test her obedience. Janicole, the shepherds, and the minstrels all join in the happy reconciliation.

Five Provençal Mysteries --the most famous being that of Saint Agnes--and one Passion Play complete the category of the fourteenth century composition.

In the twelfth century the liturgical dramas, played in Latin and within the church were called by various names, viz:--ludi, repraesentationes, historiae repraesentandae. Many even have no title. The French drama of "Adam" is called représentation. In the thirteenth century, the plays of Adam de la Halle and "Le Saint Nicolas" de Bodel were called jeux.

VII In the fourteenth century the dramatic plays were titled miracles e.g. "Miracles de Notre Dame" and "Miracle de Théophile" by Rutebeuf. The drama of Grisélidis is called histoire, but no dramatic work seems to have been called by the word mystère before the beginning the fifteenth century. Whence comes this word mystère and in what sense is the term used dramatically?

The first time that one meets this word with a dramatic significance and actually used in connection with the theatre is in the famous letters granted by Charles VI in 1402 to the Confrères de la Passion. The word does not denote something relating to the mysteries of religion. It would have been better to have written it mistère a





synonym for *métier*. It is probable that the word has nothing in common etymologically with the Greek μυστήριον or with the Latin mysterium, but it seems most probable that it comes like mestier, from the Latin ministerium, which simply means "act". In Italian we find a counterpart of this word in funzione, and in Spanish auto, both of which designate the same thing, viz:--act. Even to-day we say drama a word of analogous significance. "Le Mystère de la Passion de Saint Georges" must mean the representation of the passion of Saint George, although surely his passion was not a dogmatic mystery. Etymologically there may be another signification. Mysterium and misterium often refer to the office of the liturgy, e.g. Romanum mysterium means Roman liturgy; Misterium alicujus mortui means the office of the dead, or for the dead. Likewise "Le Mystère de la Passion," or "Le Mystère de Saint Denis", or "Le Mystère de Sainte Barbe" simply means the Office of the Passion, or the Office of Saint Denis, or the Office of Saint Barbara acted out by the people on the stage. Le Duchat expresses himself as follows:--"Le mystère, c'est à dire la farce. On disait jouer les mystères pour dire représenter par forme de pièce de theatre, les mystères de la religion. Un de ces farces, "Le Mystère du Vieil Testament" fut joué à Paris."

The Academy, in the edition of 1878, defines les mystères as follows:--"Mystère est aussi le nom que nos pères donnaient à certaines pièces de théâtre dont le sujet était tiré de Bible, et où ils faisaient intervenir Dieu, les anges et les diables, etc. Le mystère fut beau et fort dévot. Les diables jouèrent plaisamment le mystère." This meaning was not given in the original edition of 1694. Littré defines the word thus:--"Nom, au moyen âge, de certaines pièces de théâtre où l'on représentait quelqu'un des mystères de la religion."







Historically one can see how mistère et ministère were confused. It seems as if there was a confusion between the dramatic mysteries and the dogmatic mysteries. Perhaps the former derived its name from the latter because the plays frequently took their subjects from the mysteries of Christian belief.

During the first half of the fifteenth century, the word was applied to religious plays which had as secular accessories, various figured scenes like the mystères mimes, dumb shows, or tableaux vivants given on the occasion of some public function, e.g. the entry of King Charles VI and King Henry V into Paris; the banquet given to the Hungarian ambassadors etc. From these and other examples it can be seen that the word very rarely was applied to real dramatic pieces. Looking over the list of plays written during the first half of the fifteenth century, I find that the word mystère is used but once. Up to 1400 a dramatic work was never called mystère, but rather by the word jeu, miracle, vu, histoire of So and So. From 1400, the word appeared with a dramatic signification applied to scenes most often figured, mimed, mute or almost so, presented on the occasion of an extraordinary event or the entry of royalty into this city or that. It was rarely applied to religious pieces so-called. From the middle of the fifteenth century, the term mystère designated the serious dramatic plays which became more and more extended and complicated.

It is customary to group the mysteries of this century into cycles like the chansons de geste, but of course according to a different plan. There are three chief divisions:--first, the cycle of the Old Testament; second, the cycle of the new Testament (of Christ and of the apostles); third, the cycle of the saints; and fourth called miscellaneous. According to the name, one would think that the Old Testament meant just one mystery, but it really is the title







of a collection of several mysteries--about forty--each distinct in itself. To give an idea of the scope of the subjects treated in this cycle, I shall name a few of them:--"La Créacion du Ciel et de la Terre"; "La Créacion des Anges et le Trébuchement de Lucifer"; "La Créacion d'Adam et d'Eve"; "Du Deluge"; "Le Sacrifice d'Abraham"; "De David et de Goullias"; "Le Livre de Job"; "De Thobie"; "L'Hystoire de Hester". After studying this cycle, it seems to me that there is a lack of unity displayed in the work and that the length, from thirty thousand to sixty thousand verses is almost interminable, not to mention the number of actors--from one hundred to five hundred, not including a number of supernumeraries. It seems in some cases that one half of the town was amusing the other half.

The second cycle, that of the New Testament, can be divided into three parts:--first, the mysteries which contained the complete story of Christ, seven in number; second, those that contained a part of the story of Christ, ten in number; and third, those that contained the story of the Apostles--contains 61908 verses and requires 494 people to act it. The most notable mystery of the first group was by Arnoul Greban. There is also a manuscript of Saint Genevieve, but less developed. In this mystery there are four distinct parts:--"La Nativité", "Les Trois Rois", "La Passion", "La Résurrection". These four mysteries, all in one manuscript, written in the same handwriting, and with the same spirit pervading them, and in the same metre, really form one mystery. Greban, canon of the church of Le Mans, stretched his "Passion" to 35,000 verses. The famous Mystery under the second group was "La Résurrection" by Jean Michel, who also wrote "La Passion", consisting of twenty-thousand verses. Under the third group we find "Les Actes des Apotres" by Arnoul and Simon Greban. Simon was a monk of St. Riquier. "Les Actes", consisting of nearly sixty-two thousand verses was played in its entirety at Bourges, lasting forty







days. The cycle of the Saints was made up of some forty pieces, some of which are as follows:--Saint Andrew, Saint Denis, Saint Stephen, the Conversion of Saint Paul, the Martyrdom of Saint Peter and Saint Paul etc. To these we may add three other mysteries written in provençal and taken from the lives of the Saints:--Saint James, Saint Peter and Saint Paul, and Saint Pons.

Under the fourth division, miscellaneous mysteries, I would put "La Destruction de Troie" and "Le Siège d'Orleans". "Le Mystère du Siège d'Orleans" was an act of thanksgiving to God and to the Virgin played in 1429 because of the deliverance of that city. Joan of Arc appears in the play, sent from heaven, and in this episode it seems to me that the play savors somewhat of the religious and hence is not altogether profane. "La Destruction de Troie" is, I should say, profane in toto and somewhat pagan. This play was probably translated from some of those legends about Troy and by means of which the people of the Middle Ages read Homer. There seems to be a doubt as to whether or not the subject did have a popular appeal. The people who made up the audience, already familiar with the Bible stories or with the pious legends, would not have much interest, if any, in seeing the deeds of those heroes who were entirely unknown to them such as Hector, Priam, Agamemnon, Ulysses, Paris, or any other of the heroes of that war.

Now let us take a glance at some of the characteristics of the Mysteries. First, I think it will be seen that three characteristics stand out preëminently:--(a)-the constant introduction of the wonderful; (b)-the great number of places in which the action takes place;







(c)--the length of time taken to conclude the piece. The stereotyped division of time, twenty-four hours, had not yet been invented, so that a play might last a day, or a year, or a century, and so on ad infinitum. The action might be the life of the hero, who would appear as a child at the beginning of the play and as an old man at its close. I might sum this up by saying that the unity of time was unknown and the same would be said also of the unity of place. The stage could represent at once all parts of the world, and as to the wonderful, the marvelous, the supernatural, the miraculous, it appears in the title, as an accessory, and as the means of the dénouement. In a word, it was the sum total of the play. Some other characteristics are interesting and worthy of note:--The vastness of the Mysteries is positively bewildering. The great number of people or characters engaged to act out the play, sometimes running as high as five hundred, seems incomprehensible. The awful length of some of the Mysteries--sixty thousand verses--must have meant that the actors to play it condemned themselves to a labor to which few of our contemporaries would care to submit. In some "Passions" the actors who represented Christ had to recite nearly four thousand lines. Moreover, the scene of the Crucifixion had to last as long as it did in reality. It is related that in 1437 the curé Nicolle who was playing the part of Christ at Metz, was on the point of dying on the cross and had to be revived in haste. During the representation, Jehan de Missez, who was playing the part of Judas, remained hanging for so long that his heart failed and he had to be cut down and carried away to be resuscitated. Side by side with the exalted and pathetic and tragic scenes, are found others which savor of buffoonery. It must <sup>be</sup> remembered that the author wanted to copy mu-







man life where a laugh often cuts short the tear. Saint Beuve criticised the mysteries severely, comparing the successive scenes to a sort of intermittent frieze without unifying principle, but he viewed them from a literary point of view and hence did not do them justice. It is true that to the Classicist the confusion of these plays is distressing. In the classic drama the author sets forth a moral problem, abstract in its essence, to be discussed and finally solved; this he did by means of a restrained scene, minus decoration, with four or five characters, the action consisting of a few entries and exits, with some long speeches between the quick passionate dialogue. In these Mysteries that which the spectator saw represented, was not fiction but the holy realities he had seen from his childhood and had learned to venerate. What was put before his eyes was most calculated to affect him,--the doctrines of his faith; the consolations it afforded him in the sorrows of this life, and the immortal joys it promised in the next,--hence the great success of these religious performances. Most of the Mysteries opened with a prologue declaimed by a special actor, who very often was the author himself. In the prologue the author announced the subject and the principal events that he was about to treat. In "Pagliacci" we have a prologue which, as the author says, gives us the "Notions". These prologues were sermons and ended by recitation of the "Hail Mary". At the end of the prologue of "Le Mystère de Saint Ettiienne" we read "Cy dict à genoux; Ave Maria". The prologue ended by telling the actors to begin:--

"Jehan, venez vous avancer,

De vostre sermon commancer". (Note similarity to "Pagliacci".) Andiam, Incominciate".

Each day's performance began with a prologue and each performance ended with an epilogue. It gave a summary of what was seen dur-







ing the day and exhorted the people to come back the next day:--

"S'il vous plaist retournez

Tous et toutes veoir le mystère---

Venez y tous, n'y faillès mye." (From the epilogue of the first day of "La Vengeance de Jesus Christ.") The final epilogue was often a sermon and also by it thanks were expressed to those who had been present at the performance.

Notwithstanding the seriousness of these Mysteries, the comic, the buffoonery, and even the grotesque crept into them. The serious passages and the comic passages seemed to alternate. In the "Résurrection" by Jean Michel, Christ is interrupted by a blind man and his companion singing a drinking song. These rôles of buffoonery were played by secondary characters, messengers, executioners, valets, blind men, beggars, and more especially by the fools. These "Mysteries" are particularly interesting from the details in which they abound, as to the manners and customs of certain towns and provinces and are strikingly realistic. We find numerous descriptions of domestic life and details as to the habits of the unclassed. By the fifteenth century the clergy had lost their hold on the Mysteries, but they were interested in encouraging the diffusion of religious teaching and from this motive often took the initiative in the performances by contributing to them gifts, sites, loans of costumes, etc.

A few words may be said as to the manner of presentation and technique. Places were indicated by vast scenery rather than really





represented. Two or three trees represented a forest. Although the action often changed from place to place, the scenery did not change for it showed simultaneously all the various localities where the characters successively appeared in the course of the drama and which were thus in close proximity even though in reality they were far removed from each other. For the rest nothing was neglected to attract the eye. If the scenery was immovable it was very rich and secrets of theoretical mechanism often produced surprising effects. Smoke was used to imitate night and darkness. Thunder-claps were produced by means of stones rolled about in a tub and later the progress of pyrotechnics admitted of a lightning. The spectators were frequently accommodated in big amphitheatres with several timber stages capable of seating eighty thousand persons. Linen sheets spread above protected audience and actors from the rain. The show was generally free for the municipality undertook the necessary expenses; but on some occasions an entrance fee varying from ten sous to two francs fifty centimes according to the place was charged. In other cases each placed himself according to his rank and condition; the nobles and chief personages occupied the best places; the citizens and people stood or sat upon the ground, the men on the right, the women on the left.

All these details show that the Middle Ages did not know professional actors. In 1402 there was organized a society known as the Confrèries de la Passion which received a charter from Charles VI enabling it to enact dramatic performances drawn from the Passion, the Resurrection, or other holy subjects. This official attestation of dramatic literature marks an important epoch in the history of the French stage. The Confrérie, once in possession of the charter, became so active that they soon became serious competitors to the Paris churches.







They also varied their performances by combining with the comic corporations to give united shows known as the pois pilés. At first this society had its headquarters at L'Hôpital de la Trinité, then at the Gate of St. Denis, then at L'Hotel de Flandre, and finally to L'Hotel de Bourgogne when in 1548 a decree gave them definitely the monopoly of the stage, but forbade the acting in Paris of any sacred mystery. This date marks the end of the mediaeval drama when it was at its height. Nevertheless, the brotherhood did not yet give way before the attacks of the Renaissance and of Humanism, but continued to play pieces drawn from the Chansons de Geste, or from the Romances of the Round Table. The Confrérie de la Passion lived on till 1676 and then Louis XIV suppressed them and turned over their property to the general hospital. Previous to the establishment of the Confrérie de la Passion, there had been established a Confrérie of St. Crispin made up of shoemakers, the members of which walked in procession to Notre-Dame on the 25th of October and there performed the Mystery of their patron. The Confrérie de la Passion was the outgrowth of a society formed of citizens, master-masons, locksmiths and others united in Paris to give various plays drawn from the New Testament for the benefit of the public. They were expelled from the village of Saint-Maur and then received the charter from Charles VII in 1402.

As regards the aesthetic side of this drama, modern standards should not be applied. The Mysteries are for the most part insipid. Once in a while there are some details which show rather happy ingeniousness, perhaps some pathetic trait, or even a dialogue that is as we say to-day "snappy." As to art, we see but little; as to taste, but little. Moral has no analyses, and there is no development of character,







no unity of composition. Each of these characteristics constitutes a weakness. On the other hand, we must not forget that the author said things as they occurred to him, without display of selection, gradation, or taste. They had facility, but they abused it, and never amended. Hence the Mysteries are verbose. Beauty of verse was a secondary matter; something more striking was essential to instruct or amuse the vast throngs or more noticeable metrical forms, ballads, ~~triolets~~, or rondeaux, by the tragic and the grotesque. The Mysteries abound in anachronisms, the inevitable consequence of the passion that their authors had for parading their literary science at any cost.

We must not think that, although the decree of 1548 prohibited the production of the Mysteries in Paris, they disappeared altogether, because the records show that plays had been presented in 1560, 1573, 1580. Even to-day, I am told that on certain feast days the religious drama is acted.

VIII Along with the Mystery Play, Comedy, which originated in the Church in the burlesque of the offices of the "Feast of Fools," or the "Feast of the Ass", made a new start. M. Petit de Julleville said, "Humanity was no longer contented with tradition. From henceforward it would use the forces of its intelligence to observe, to analyse, and to conclude." Thus we see the clerks in the Government service, formed, like the trade guilds, corporations the most powerful of which was the Clercs de la Basoche which included the lawyers. This society was privileged to give representations in the great Hall of the Palais de Justice. They really created a new type, the Morality or allegorical play which is only one of the forms of Comedý in the Middle Ages. The earliest Moralities inculcated a hatred of vice and a love of virtue. For the most part they opposed the life of the reprobate to that of the virtuous man. At other times they attacked a particular vice:--gluttony,







jealousy, or blasphemy. In the class of Moralities that established a contrast between the conduct of the good man and the bad man, we must cite "Bien-Avisé et Mal-Avisé". The first personifies the virtuous man; the second the perverted sinner. Some of the other allegorical personages are Contrition, Confession, Alms, Diligence, Patience, Prudence, Fortune and Satan. The author, after harrowing the spectators by setting forth the sufferings of the evil-doer in Hell, sends them away with a good taste in their mouths by picturing the apotheosis of the virtuous man carried up to Heaven by the angels. Some others of the Moralities were designed to give advice to parents on the education of their children; thus in "Enfants de Maintenant" in which the allegorical personages are Instruction and Discipline. In "L'Enfant Ingrat" there is an attack on parents who wish from pride to educate their children above their social station. I might mention also "L'Aveugle et le Boiteux", a morality of a special type and has the turn of the true comedy.

The second form of comedy is the Moral Farce--the Political Comedy. Its writers and interpreters being not only the Clercs de la Basoche, but members of the society called "Les Enfants Sans-Souci". During this particular period of the theatre expressed the grievances of the people and also their approbation. From this twofold point of view, these comedies express the true History of France--its internal and its external politics.

Les Enfants Sans Souci was a society composed of the sons of good bourgeois families who were well educated for that period. It is not always easy to distinguish the pieces of the Enfants Sans Souci from those of the Basochians, more especially as the plays of one and the other company are termed indiscriminately "farces". The Enfants Sans Souci acted their plays on trestles set up in the market-place and on great occasions in front of the Hall aux Poissons.







This society had the right to act the Soties, an intermediate type between the Farce and the Morality, a type dominated by satire, e.g. - "Le Jeu du Prince des Sots". Among the more essentially satirical of the Farces, one is the most famous: -- "Mond, Abus, les Sots" attributed by some to Gringoire. The author mocks the whole human society under the pretense that the world is made up of fools and blockheads. Among the social types the most closely studied and most successfully ridiculed in the Farces is the advocate Pathelin. "La Farce de Maitre Pathelin" is the one piece of the Middle Ages of any real literary value and is the first regular comedy to appear in France.

In the Middle Ages the name comedy was also given to a special type -- the Monologue, a sort of burlesque recitation to make an exposé of all his caprices and to excite the laughter of the spectators. It did not survive the sixteenth century.

I may conclude this paragraph by saying that the Morality in shedding its abstract personages developed naturally into comedy of character, e.g. - "L'Avare" - "Le Misanthrope" - "Tartuffe". The farce developed into the Comedy of Manners, e.g. \* "Les Précieuses Ridicules", the plays of Dancourt, of Picart, and Labiche.

There was probably no greater impulse for social uplift and for real education of the masses than these mystery and miracle plays, in which the people took part themselves, and in which, as a consequence of the presence of friends in the various roles, the spectators had a livelier interest than would have been otherwise the case under even more favorable circumstance. In recent years, there has come the realization that the drama may thus be made a real educational influence. Unfortunately to-day, whatever of influence it has, is







exerted almost exclusively upon the better-to-do classes who have so many other opportunities for educational uplift. These early plays brought the people intimately into contact with the great characters of the Old and New Testament history and besides giving them precious religious information, which of itself, however, might mean very little for true education, helped them to an insight into character and to a right appreciation of human actions and a sympathy with what was right even though it entailed suffering such as could not have otherwise been obtained.

Of course it is easy to say that such dramas constantly repeated, the subjects always the same and only the cast varying from year to year, would become intolerably familiar and might after a time degenerate into the merely contemptible. As a matter of fact, these old stories of religious heroes were written so close to the heart of nature, involved so intimately all the problems of life, that they are of undying interest. Their repetition was only from year to year and this did not give the opportunity for familiarity that breeds contempt. Even though the plays existed in definite forms there seems no doubt that certain changes were made by the players themselves and by the managers of the plays from time to time, and indeed such changes of the text of a play as we know from our present day experience are almost inevitable.

It might be questioned whether the people themselves would be possessed of the histrionic talent necessary to make the plays effective. Ordinarily, however, as we know from our modern city life, much less of the actor's art is needed than of interest of action to secure the <sup>attention</sup> the/







of the gallery. Actors are more born than made. It must not be forgotten that the Passion Play of Oberammergau, one of the world's greatest spectacles, is an example, the only one I believe, of these mystery plays. It is only the old, old, old story of the Passion and the death of the Lord. It is represented by villagers chosen from among the inhabitants, who, while they have a distinct taste for the artistic and produce some of the best wood-carving done anywhere in Europe, thus in a way approximating very interestingly the peoples of the early centuries, are not particularly noted for their education, nor for their dramatic ability. It is distinctly an example of how well men and women do things when they are thoroughly interested in them, and when they are under the influence of an old-time tradition according to which they must have the ability to accomplish what is expected of them. Such a tradition existed during the Thirteenth and Fourteenth centuries leading to a gradual development of dramatic power both in writers and in actors, that eventually was to result in the magnificent outburst of dramatic genius during the next period. Within the last few years most of the large cities have been given the opportunity to hear one of the great products of this form of literary activity--"Everyman". Its author only took the four last things to be remembered:--Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell,--things which must come to every man, and wrote his story around them, yet he did it with such dramatic effectiveness as to make his drama a triumph of literary execution.

The Mystery Plays were as interesting in their way to the Middle Ages as "Everyman" to us. Too much can scarcely be said of







the educational value of such dramatic exercises; the Bible itself with its deep religious teachings, with its simple but sublime style, with its beautiful poetry, entered for a time into the very lives of these people. No wonder the speech of those Middle Ages became saturated with biblical thoughts and words. Anyone who has ever had any experience with amateur theatricals when a really great play was given, will be able to realize how much more thoroughly every quality, dramatic, literary, poetic, even lyric and historical that there might be in the drama, entered into the hearts and minds of those who took part. The people's interest in these mystery plays lifted them out of themselves and out of their trivial round of life into the higher life of this great religious poetry. Thus their familiarity with scripture made it something not to be discussed merely, but to be applied to their everyday affairs.

Besides this, the organization of the company to give the play and the necessity for display and exercise of taste in the costumes and of ingenuity in stage settings were of themselves of great educational value. During the months of preparation there was an intense preoccupation of mind with great thoughts and beautiful words. It was an intellectual and elocutionary training that went with the work. What the modern theatre does with premeditation, the old guilds did almost unconsciously but even more effectively and their success must be considered as one of the social triumphs of these wonderful early centuries.

Perhaps it is only in somewhat recent years that the idea has succeeded in making way into government circles that the giving of free entertainments for the poor would form an excellent addition to other educational procedures. After all the subvention allowed by







some governments to the great theatres and opera houses is really part of the same policy though unfortunately they are calculated to affect only the upper classes, who need the help and stimulus of great dramatic art and great music less than the lower classes, who have so little variety or anything that makes for uplift in their lives. In Boston, however, a commendable effort to supply, not the stimulus of great music for the upper classes, but an uplift for the school children by means of great music, was made by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, in a concert to which only pupils of the schools were admitted at a very much reduced price. Again I might cite that time during which the Boston Opera Company was in vogue, although Boston could not support the company, yet the prices at the Sunday concerts given by the artists of that company were so reasonable that the poorer classes had an opportunity to hear the best music.

In the Middle Ages this very modern notion was anticipated in such a way as to benefit the very poorest of the population, and that not only passively, i.e. - by the hearing dramatic performance, but also actively, by taking parts in them and so having all the details of the action and the words impressed upon them.

IX With the debased drama of the Roman Empire, the theatre of Shakespeare, Calderon, Molière, and Schiller has no direct connection. The isolated mimi or nugatores, who may for a while have survived the downfall of the Empire and become strollers, tumblers, joculatores (jongleurs) and even minstrels cannot be shown to have inspired any new dramatic developments. The Christian imitations of Terence by the Abbess Hroswitha of Gandersheim, or Suffering Christ  $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\acute{o}\varsigma \pi\acute{\alpha}\sigma\chi\omega\nu$  of Byzantine literature inspired no imitators and apparently were not even intended for representation. Thus there is a consensus of opinion that the modern drama has sprung out of the Mystery, or Miracle Plays of the Middle Ages and is ultimately religious in its origin.







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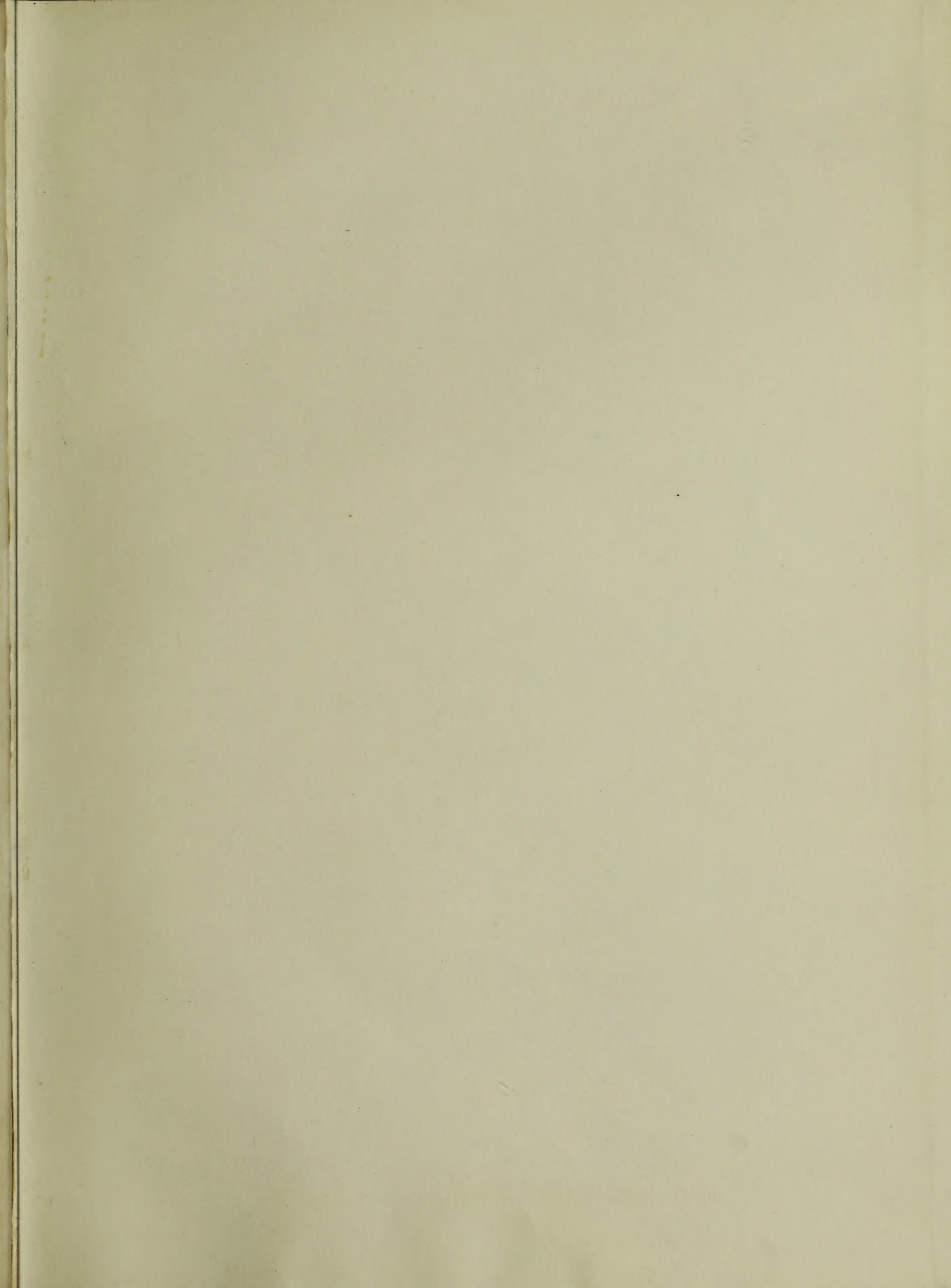
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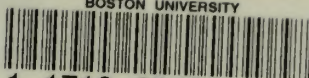








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